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RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 4420
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 3036
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 7576
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1642
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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/R/MR:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, AZAIBACK, AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA MDAVIDSON
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
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SUBJECT: Syria/PLO, Arab Summit, Peace Process, Iraq, Lebanon
(3/26)

¶1. Summary: Papers on Mar. 26 reported the visit to Damascus by Rouhi Fattouh, Special Envoy of Mahmoud Abbas, Chairman of the Palestinian National Authority, and his meeting with VP Shara on Mar. 25 conveying a message from President Abbas to President Asad on the latest Palestinian developments. Talks dealt with the forthcoming Arab summit in Riyadh and the need for the summit to produce clear decisions to support the Palestinian national unity government, to adopt a unified Arab position regarding lifting the siege on Palestinians, and to reject the current Israeli maneuvers which aim at undermining the Arab Peace Initiative. Fattouh also met with FM Mouallem on Mar. 25.

On the issue of the Arab summit, papers reported FM Mouallem's arrival in Riyadh on Mar. 25 to chair the Syrian delegation to the preparatory ministerial meeting preceding the 19th Arab Summit scheduled to begin in Riyadh on Mar. 28. A news report featured Mouallem's statement upon arrival expressing hope that the summit will result in resolutions that contribute to Arab solidarity. He was quoted as saying, "Syrian-Saudi cooperation constitutes a strong basis to make Arab joint action a success in facing the dangers and threats to which the Arab nation is exposed."

Papers also reported that Saudi FM Saud al-Faisal reiterated rejection of any amendments to the Arab peace initiative. In a statement to reporters on Mar. 25 following a tour at the media center in Riyadh along with Arab League Secretary General Amr Mousa, al-Faisal confirmed that there can be no amendment or change of the Arab peace initiative adopted in the Beirut summit in 2002.

Papers also reported that Osama el-Baz, advisor to Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, reiterated on Mar. 25 the importance of reviving the peace process in the Middle East, including the Syrian track, and finding a comprehensive and just solution in the Middle East. In a Symposium held at the Egyptian University Ein Shams, el-Baz called for dealing with the Iraqi issue by boosting Arab cooperation to restore stability and tackle security problems in Iraq. He stressed the necessity of supporting the Palestinian people in order to restore their legitimate rights.

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"President Asad receives a message from Chairman Abbas. Shara and Fattouh discuss Israeli maneuvers to demolish the Arab peace initiative" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 3/26)

"Agenda of the Arab summit reiterates commitment to the Arab peace initiative. Mouallem: Syrian/Saudi cooperation is a strong factor to make joint Arab action a success" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 3/26)

"Syrian optimism on the success of the Arab summit; FM Saud al-Faisal: No amendment of the Arab peace initiative" (Government-owned Tishreen, 3/26)

"The Lebanese opposition denounces the isolationist scheme to establish a police-like state in Lebanon: No alternative to escalation so long the governing team continues to be governed by foreign powers" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 3/26)

"Egypt confirms persistence in support of the Arab initiative and Rice rejects its amendment" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 3/26)

"Olmert preempts Rice's meeting with Abbas by stepping up criticism of Abbas. Rice: The Arab initiative is an opportunity... We did not request any amendments" (Government-owned Tishreen, 3/26)

"Ban Ki-moon promises to enforce UN's resolutions on the separation wall and Israeli settlements" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 3/26)

"Killing of five US soldiers in Baghdad. Senator Hagel: It is high time to end US presence in Iraq" (Government-owned Tishreen, 3/26)

"Confrontation between Democrats and the Bush Administration enters a advanced stage. Cheney: I will not allow an early withdrawal from Iraq. Pelosi: Americans have lost confidence in their administration" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 3/26)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"Rice Has Found the Knot!"

Maha Sultan, a columnist in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (3/26):
"What brings Rice to the region again and again, especially since she does not accomplish the minimum, as is said...?"

"Diplomacy and politics in general are the art of maneuvering and feinting, rather than a direct style of confrontation. So it would be wrong not to see that Rice returns every time with the blueprint of a new maneuver to propose to the parties in the region. She gets answers and reactions and returns to her country to study and discuss, then comes back with a new approach that avoids the shortcomings of the previous visit...."

"Rice and her Administration in general have come to rely on a policy of building on developments in order to adapt US plans and divide them into phases...."

"On every tour, Rice visits nearly the same countries with an agenda containing multiple objectives and demands. But according to Egypt's Foreign Minister, Ahmad Abu-al-Ghayt, the new tour has a single item on the agenda, namely an Israeli-Palestinian settlement. It should be noted however that the developments in the region, especially the upcoming Arab summit, assume there are many topics--unless they have been agreed upon on earlier tours."

"The settlement topic is not new to Rice's agenda. What is new is the report by the Washington Post that Rice will adopt a new diplomatic formula to implement it on the basis of combining what the media dub as the Arab Quartet (Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates) with Israel in order to circumvent the HAMAS knot (to which is currently added the knot of the Palestinian national unity government). This is the knot she runs into every time, according to Rice's own admission some days ago before the US

House of Representatives. So, according to the newspaper, Rice has finally discovered the knot. But with what saw is she trying to cut it, assuming that this assumption is correct?

"Season of Confessions"

Ali Qasim, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawrah, wrote (3/26): "Former US Ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton's confessions regarding the US position during the recent Israeli war on Lebanon show the direct American responsibility for that aggression and Lebanon's right to take legal action against the United States for the destruction that befell Lebanon and the victims who fell in that aggression...."

"The responsibility is not only ethical and political, but also legal and requires serious follow-up...."

"Lebanon's experience showed a new job for Israel.... In the past the American role was to help Israel realize its objectives. Now the situation is different: Israel has become a tool to implement American objectives through the use of its aggression...."

"Bush's Veto against the US Will as Well"

Muhyi-al-Din al-Muhammad, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (3/26): "President Bush, through his threat to veto the House of Representatives resolution on Iraq, took off his last democratic mask...."

"President Bush fully realizes that nothing can change in Iraq in favor of his mad war. There can be nothing other than an increase in the losses of the American Army, further immersion in the mud of chaos and the pools of blood, and more hatred toward his administration. Yet he insists on continuing with the mistakes and trading in achievements that were not and will not be attained in Iraq because the peoples of the world, who won liberation from direct colonialism at the end of the first half and the beginning of the second half of the 20th century, and who paid a dear price to achieve independence, will not accept occupation once again in the 21st century...."

"The New Palestinian Government's Wager"

Adnan Ali, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawrah, wrote (3/26): "The way Israel dealt with the new Palestinian government did not come as a surprise because Israel has always wanted to tighten its siege on the people and government in Palestine as part of its permanent strategy to weaken Palestinians and reduce -- and if possible totally undermine -- their national ambitions. But what was surprising was the position of the US Administration, which announced that it will deal with only one minister in the new government, although Israel itself is saying that it will deal with part of the Palestinian Authority...."

"US President Bush and Israeli Prime Minister Olmert are unable to take any steps to activate the peace process in the region on any of the negotiating tracks between the Arabs and Israel.... Olmert is haunted by the failure in Lebanon and by domestic scandals, while Bush is up to his ears in the Iraqi crisis...."

"Palestinians must wager on enhancing their national unity and must win over the world community, which has started to react positively to the Palestinian position.... The Arab summit must make an unambiguous decision to break the siege on Palestinians, as has been done by Norway, which has taken a courageous decision in that regard without permission from anybody."

Corbin